

8b
ND
1640
.M57
1854

DIRT & PICTURES SEPARATED

H. MERRITT.

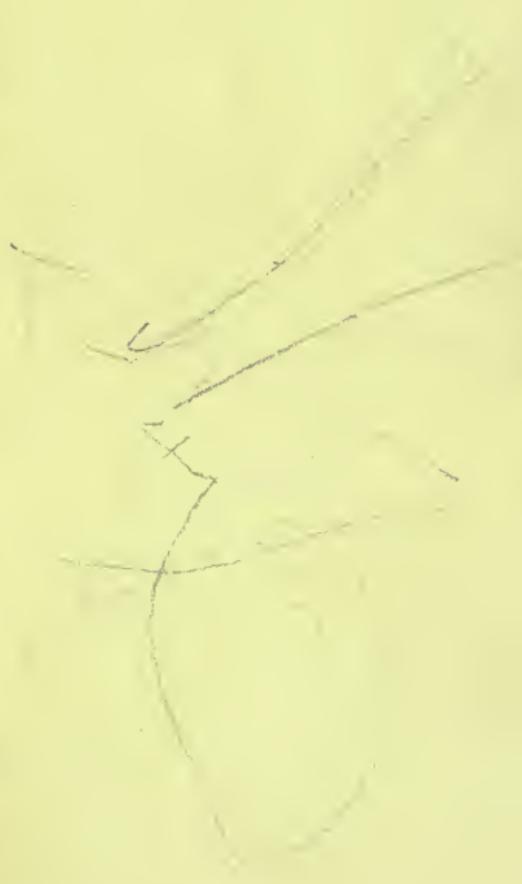
THE GETTY CENTER LIBRARY



Why ask for the moon
When we have the stars?

AS

128 Lee Ave.,
No. 1.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2016

<https://archive.org/details/dirtpicturesepa00merr>





Dirt and Pictures Separated.



DIRT AND PICTURES

SEPARATED,

IN THE

WORKS OF THE OLD MASTERS.

BY

HENRY MERRITT.

‘Who, in contemplating one of Raphael’s finest pictures, fresh from the master’s hand, ever bestowed a thought on the wretched little worm which works its destruction?’—MARIA EDGEWORTH.

LONDON :

HOLYOAKE AND CO., 147, FLEET STREET.

1854.

CONS.
ND
1640
357
1854

TO

WILLIAM ALFRED DELAMOTTE, ESQ.,

WHO,

WHEN I WAS A BOY, A STRANGER, UNKNOWN

TO HIM EVEN BY NAME,

CAREFULLY AND GRATUITOUSLY INSTRUCTED ME

IN THE RUDIMENTS OF ART,

I INSCRIBE THIS LITTLE VOLUME,

WITH LONG-CHERISHED FEELINGS

OF RESPECT.

Publishers' Preface.

THE scholar, the gentleman, and the connoisseur, are naturally interested in the picture art. They claim to understand whatever relates to it, and to appreciate the varied discussions and criticisms of which the great art of painting is the constant subject. At first sight it would seem that interest in this topic must be confined to these classes. But literature, which has penetrated to all orders of men, has made even the fine arts to have a definite relation to the humblest, to whom some of the noblest collections of pictures and sculptures have been opened for popular contemplation. Thousands now flock to witness and to wonder at productions of the pencil and the chisel, hitherto confined to favoured eyes. Statesmen and friends of education have borne witness to the refining influence of art on

the multitude. The Author of this treatise is justly of opinion that refinement can scarcely take place without a thorough understanding of the objects gazed upon and venerated. Some urge that the English have not that constitutional aptness for the fine arts peculiar to certain nations. But if our people, to use the language of Prince Hoare, are not 'driven impetuously by constitution or passion' to such pursuits, it is very manifest that they can be 'directed regularly, by reason, to the same ends.'

One objection will occur to many—namely, that any dissertation on the practical details of art must be unfitted for general perusal. This is one of those apprehensions that have survived the period when they were true.

When education was altogether deficient, and the people were generally neglected, papers on practical art were of course unintelligible. But now matters are changed, and whilst we have economical and fiscal disquisitions, including all the practical details of statesmanship, as a necessary portion of newspaper information, architecture, painting, music, and sculpture are at last become questions of national taste and universal

accomplishments. These arts are capable of being made intelligible, and there can be no doubt that they will be found as interesting as rival theories and interminable controversies on matters social and political.

We are persuaded that striking facts and experiences relating to the works of great painters will be welcome and useful to all. A truly national care is beginning to be felt for those master works which are collected in the large room in Trafalgar Square, and at Marlborough House. The means employed for the preservation of the national pictures have been very generally discussed. Controversies on this subject in 1846, and again in 1852, have occupied the attention of parliament, the press, and the public. The fact is, people are really growing in earnest about works of art—an interest which, we conceive, can best be rendered permanent, intelligent, and refining, by affording them intelligible information upon the creation, criticism, and preservation of those universal instructors—Great Paintings, which speak, with the eloquence of nature, to people of all tongues and all times. The following work, as respects authorship, matter, and spirit, we deem calculated to promote this end.

Author's Preface.

A PART of this work has already appeared in the columns of the *Leader*. Other portions are derived from a few letters which received publicity in the pages of the *Athenæum*. To these additions have been made, with the object of realising something like a complete whole. In this design, however, the author is very far from satisfied that he has been successful.

His incidental object has been to assist in defining the province of the Restorer in relation to the Works of the Old Masters.

1, Woburn Buildings, Tavistock Square.

Index of Painters Cited.

—o—

Name.		Birthplace.	Born.	Died.
Backhuysen		Embden . .	1631	1709
Claude		Lorraine . .	1600	1682
Correggio		Correggio . .	1490	1534
Cuyp (Albert)		Dort . .	1606	1667
Dolci (Carlo)		Florence . .	1616	1686
Dow, or Douw (Gerard)		Leyden . .	1613	1674
Durer		Nuremberg . .	1471	1528
Etty		York . .	1787	1849
Eyck (John Van)		Maaseyk . .	1370	1441
Gaddi (Taddeo)		Florence . .	1300	1352
Giorgione	{	Castel Franco, near Venice }	1478	1511
Greemer, or Grimmer		Antwerp . .	1510	1546
Guido (Reni)		Bologna . .	1574	1642
Heem (John David De)		Utrecht . .	1600	1674
Hogarth		London . .	1697	1764
Holbein		Basil . .	1498	1554
Hoppner (John)		England . .	1759	1810
Huysum (John Van)		Amsterdam . .	1682	1749
Jervas (Charles)		Ireland . .	—	1740
Lawrence (Sir Thomas)		Bristol . .	1769	1830
Messina (Antonio da)		Messina . .	alive in 1494	
Mieris (Francis)		Leyden . .	1635	1681
Mignon		Frankfort . .	1639	1679

Name.		Birthplace.	Born.	Died.
Murillo		Seville . .	1613	1682
Piles (De')		{ Clameci, in France }	1635	1709
Netscher (Gaspard)		Heidelberg .	1639	1684
Ostade (Adrian)		Lubeck . .	1610	1685
Ostade (Isaac)		Lubeck . .	1613	1671
Piombo (Sebastiano del)		Venice . .	1485	1547
Polidoro, or Caravaggio		Caravaggio .	1495	1543
Raphael		Urbino . .	1483	1520
Rembrandt		Near Leyden .	1606	1674
Reynolds (Sir Joshua)		Plymton .	1723	1792
Roger of Bruges, or Van der Weyde		Brussels . .	1480	1529
Romano (Giulio)		Rome . .	1492	1546
Romney (George)		Dalton . .	1734	1802
Rubens		Cologne . .	1577	1640
Ruysdael (Jacob)		Haerlem . .	1636	1681
Seghers (Daniel)		Antwerp . .	1590	1660
Teniers (the younger)		Antwerp . .	1610	1694
Titian		{ Friuli, near Venice }	1480	1576
Turner (J. M. W.)		London . .	—	1851
Vandervelde (the young.)		Amsterdam .	1633	1707
Vandyke		Antwerp . .	1598	1641
Velasquez		Seville. .	1594	1660
Vinci (Leonardo Da)		Florence . .	1445	1520
Watteau		Valenciennes .	1684	1731

Contents.

—o—

	PAGE.
Chap. I. OBSCURED PICTURES	1
II. DURABILITY OF PICTURES IN OIL	8
III. ANTIPATHY TO PICTURE RESTORATIONS	13
IV. PICTURE CLEANING	22
V. THE VARNISH GLAZE THEORY	25
VI. STANDARD PICTURES	32
VII. VANDYKE'S PROCESS OF WORKING	37
VIII. SPECIAL CASES FROM REMBRANDT	43
IX. AN IDEAL PROCESS OF PAINTING	49
X. IDIOSYNCRACIES OF PICTURE COLLECTORS	54
XI. PROFESSIONAL ADVISERS	58
XII. PICTURE DESTROYERS	64
XIII. THE RESTORER	67
XIV. DEVOTION OF THE RESTORER	70



Dirt and Pictures Separated.

CHAPTER I.

O B S C U R E D P I C T U R E S.

IT has been said that the delight of a connoisseur is ‘a dark, invisible, very fine old picture;’ and there can be no doubt of the existence, among admirers of the old masters, of considerable reverence for the mysterious stains and discolourations which pictures acquire by neglect, in the long lapse of years. Enthusiastic collectors will exult in the ‘golden’ splendour of a Claude, the ‘glowing warmth’ of a Cuyp, or the ‘rich transparent browns’ of Rembrandt, which qualities, in a large degree, are occasioned by coatings of discoloured varnishes and oils, producing upon the pictures effects similar to layers of stained glass. A celebrated critic, speaking of Sebastiano del Piombo’s ‘Raising of Lazarus,’ in the National Gallery, grows eloquent on the dark incrustation by which that famous composition is obscured. He says, ‘the figure of Lazarus is very fine and bold. The flesh is *well baked, dingy*, and ready to crumble from the touch, when it is liberated from its dread confinement to have life and motion impressed on it again.’ Thus it is inferred that Sebastiano stooped to the trivial artifice of imparting an appearance of half putrefaction to the exhumed corpse. The ‘baked’ look of the figure is an affair of time

and the critics, and not of the original painter. Did not Hazlitt overlook the too evident fact, that the noble picture referred to is embedded beneath a thick covering, compounded of half opaque varnish, patches of modern paint, and dirt, and that the figure of Lazarus is only discoloured in the same degree as the other portions of the work? The same critic dwells rapturously on the decayed cartoons of Raphael at Hampton Court. After describing the spirit and beauties of those divine pictures, he proceeds to account for their transcendental qualities, which he thinks 'perhaps are not all owing to genius—something may be owing to the decayed and dilapidated state of the pictures themselves,' which 'are the more majestic for being in ruins.' He delights to observe 'that all the petty, meretricious part of the art is dead in them; that 'the carnal is made spiritual; that 'the corruptible has put on incorruption; and that 'amidst the wreck of colour, and the mouldering of material beauty, nothing is left but a universe of thought, or the broad, imminent shadows of calm contemplation or majestic pains.' We dissent with deference from the opinions of one who so often thought justly, and always expressed himself well. But when the mind escapes from the enchanting thraldom of these imposing words, we are disposed to ask, 'Did it never occur to critics accepting these views absolutely, that if the painter had intended all these appearances of decay, and included the infirmities of age among the beauties of his design, that it was in his power to have produced them before he dismissed the work from his studio?' Doubtless, he never contemplated such effects, and we are bound to study the intention of the master, and to respect it. Is not every eminent picture-buyer jealous of the im-

position of modern copies upon him as the incontestible productions of the master? The artistic impostor—the dread of the connoisseur and the disgrace of art—owes the success of his counterfeit issues to this fashion of preserving the genuine productions in a half invisible state. Artificial discolourations and layers of dirt are to these creators of the 'modern antique' what night and darkness are to the highwayman and the burglar. If decay is to be trusted as the source of so much beauty, it should lead to practical results, which we never see attempted by any partisan of the theory. Whatever principle is true in theory may become the foundation of practice; but what would be said if some ingenious theorist, of a scientific turn, should haply discover some process by which the decay of pictures might be facilitated, and the picture-gazer of this age be enabled to possess himself of intellectual delights which in the ordinary course of things he would never live to enjoy? What would be said if, seized with this idea, the trustees of the National Gallery should order the most valuable of the pictures in their charge to undergo an ordeal to get rid of their gross 'material' and 'carnal' qualities? We should soon see this theory of beauty by destruction considerably recast.

The value in which the learned Doctor Cornelius held the 'rust, the precious ærugo,' which clung so tenaciously to the famous shield, is not extraordinary, when contrasted with the singular affection manifested by able connoisseurs for the 'venerable verdure' which obscures so many *chefs-d'œuvre* of the old painters. The strange appearances of decay which that learned doctor styles 'the traces of time,' and 'beautiful obscurities, where doubts and curiosities go hand in hand, and eternally exercise the speculations of the

learned'—these awaken quite as much interest and admiration when discovered on the surfaces of old pictures as when found on half-obliterated coins and battered armour. But whoever shall employ any artifice to decay pictures, in order to realise these beauties, will soon be reminded that we keep costly Picture Galleries and National Museums, in which to *preserve* valuable remains of the Fine Arts; and, despite our theory that

'Statues *moulder* into *worth*,'

and that pictures put off the 'corruptible' to put on 'incorruption,' we keep the day of supreme perfection as far distant as we are able.

Hogarth, being much in the company of cognoscenti, and hearing them continually aver that the works of the old painters were much indebted for the charms which they possessed to the mellowing influence of time, took an opportunity to venture a contrary opinion, asserting that 'pictures only grew black and worse by age.' Walpole, commenting upon this, sides with the collectors, saying that Hogarth could not 'distinguish in what degree the proposition might be true or false.' Doubtless Hogarth intended his words for those who, in his time, were affecting such unqualified admiration of rust and dirt. The painter would have admitted that colours do gradually soften in the drying; but this natural softening is a very different effect to that which is produced by a horn-like incrustation spread equally over the whole surface of the picture.

It may be said with confidence, that the charms of pictures having any pretensions to fine colouring cannot be enhanced by this over-rated 'varnish of time'

—especially those subjects which partake of a ‘gay and festive’ character, of which the productions of Rubens and Watteau furnish examples. The annoyance which the delicate, fantastic ladies of the Frenchman would have felt at its presence on their sparkling robes of silk and satin, is precisely what the gazer should feel when it interferes with his enjoyment of the pictures of this charming court painter; and the same may be said of the incrustation, when it hides from us the ruddy, glowing objects depicted by the luscious pencil of the great Fleming. It has been said of another painter’s colours—whose pictures, from the intense religious sentiment they possess, are so well suited to the cloister—‘That it would seem as if he could have dipped his pencil in the hues of some serenest and star-shining twilight;’ and let it be urged that colours so pure and refined as to merit this distinctive eulogy little need the addition of a ‘golden’ glaze.

The great preponderance of brown colour which we observe on the pictures of Rembrandt, and the yellow or gold cast on the works of Titian, have resulted from causes in no way originating with those painters. Few masters’ productions are seen to worse advantage than Titian’s, and that by reason of the very effects which are said to mellow and improve them. In illustration of this, we may cite an example offered by the present writer in a letter to the *Athenæum*. A portrait by one of the Venetian masters (which came under the writer’s notice) furnished a striking example of time-mellowing. The lawn robe of the Ecclesiastic, precisely and delicately pencilled, with a century’s dirt upon it, is not like lawn, but like sackcloth. Its innumerable small folds and indentations—its chaste, lily-like whiteness and violet-hued shadowings—are all

buried and lost. His holiness has no longer the fiery eye of the serpent. The emerald stone on the shrivelled finger is no longer lustrous. The clean, elaborate grey beard is a fiction ; the truth of the carnations a matter of faith ; and the ample cape of crimson velvet has sunk into a coarse cloth of sober brown.

Granting to admirers of richly-toned pictures that old oils and varnishes sometimes produce pleasing effects in parts of the foregrounds in sunny pictures, yet the impropriety of preserving them, even on such portions, cannot be doubted, when we reflect that neither Claude nor Cuyp, nor any painter, is to be justly credited with the creation of beauties which are the result of chance ; for chance never formed part in any great artist's calculation of effects. Reflection brings us to believe that the slightest film on a fine picture is an undoubted evil. Every good picture, no matter what the subject—whether figures or landscape, or both combined—suffers more or less in proportion to the extent of its obscuration. An idea of distances, and the appearances of remote objects, can only be realised by a skilful management of air tints. Truth is as much obscured in a picture by the corruption of these tints as in linear perspective by the perversion of the lines.

The horn-like glazing of old varnish and oils must needs defile all the refinements which constitute a fine landscape. Nor is the hateful incrustation less hurtful in other portions of the picture. Its pernicious influence is alike traceable on the boldest parts of near objects. The 'purple tinge which the mountain assumes as it recedes or approaches ; the grey moss upon the ruin ; the variegated greens and mellow browns of foliage'—in short, the colours in every part of nature,

suffer alike from the much-admired 'varnish of time.' In historical pictures, the nicer points, which are the evidence of mastery, are alike involved. The various distinctions of colour in age and in sex, the 'bloom of youth and the wan cheek of sickness,' are not spared. The 'golden' compound is permitted to reduce each and all into one level tone; and cheerfulness and gloom, hope and despair, the times of the day and the seasons of the year, all wear the same look of sadness when beheld through the smoked glass of the picture-worm; for there are picture-worms as well as 'book-worms.'

CHAPTER II.

DURABILITY OF PICTURES IN OIL.

THE complimentary language of Pope to Jervas, the portrait painter, in the following couplet—

‘Beauty, frail flower, which every season fears,
Blooms in thy colours for a thousand years,’

might be applied to many of the old painters with considerable show of truth. It is no uncommon thing, on cleaning pictures which have been painted two, three, and even four hundred years, to discover the colours fresh and beautiful as when they left the palette. The flower pieces of John Van Huysum, Mignon, Seghers, and De Heem, yet vie with nature in brightness of tints. While penning this, the author has before him a work by Seghers, composed of a few white and red roses interwoven with an ivy wreath, side by side with some roses fresh from the garden, placed in a sunny window, so as to have the shadows of a dark grove, at a short distance beyond, for background; and such is the truthfulness and tenderness of the flowers in the picture, so little are they injured by time, that art and nature live side by side, and art seems to derive advantage by the rivalry. Van Huysum’s vase of flowers at Dulwich College (the one in which the blue tint predominates) could never have been more perfect in respect to its colours than at the present time. Tints of the utmost conceivable brightness and delicacy are yet perceptible to the naked eye, and are even enhanced when viewed through a magni-

fying lens of great power. There is a vase of flowers by Mignon at the Hague, in which the dew-drops have a diamond-like freshness, and reflect the delicate hues of a warm sunbeam which falls upon the flowers and displays a number of insects 'clothed in rainbow and in fire.' The connoisseur is familiar with pictures by Carlo Dolci—of lovely Madonnas and penitent Magdalens, with pale marble faces and tearful eyes—which pictures, for freshness and solidity, might still bear comparison with any pictures similar in style of yesterday's painting. In contrast with the enamelled softness of the Italian, we have crowds of mythological deities and personages of every description from the pencil of Rubens. Fair, round, Cyprian queens, in loosely flowing crimson robes, accompanied by sportive cupids, wing their airy flights in chariots of silver and gold, drawn by fairy-like doves or graceful swans. The glowing limbs of the love-gods and goddesses, the bright plumage of the birds, contrasted with the azure sky and purple clouds, appear still in all the depth and richness of the rose and purity of the lily—while the gorgeous display of Vulcanic skill, the silver and gold, present no sign of dimness; on the contrary, time seems to have imparted to the colours of the great Flemish artist a purer and deeper lustre, a lustre and purity which pictures at first seldom possess. One might enumerate in every school pictures which are instances of high preservation. We still contemplate the pride and beauty of Spain in the virgin tints of Velasquez and on the canvases of Vandyke, as in a glass—we compare the still fairer women of England, who, if they exceeded in beauty the transcripts of the courtly Vandyke, must have been more than humanly beautiful. Here still the mild radiance of the costly

pearl reveals the dark recesses of the silken robe, or glitters like morning dew on the soft folds of luxuriant tresses. The glare of colour and its grossness have departed—but over all there still lingers an intense beauty, a life-like warmth and transcendent sweetness.

The juicy, luscious look in the colours of Flemish and Dutch masters, is not owing to the presence of liquid oil still in the colours, for in the process of drying, the oil in which the colours were ground, found its way to the surface, whence it has subsequently been removed, and its place supplied by varnish. Albert Durer's pictures are still remarkable for a certain juicy freshness, in contradistinction to what is called the 'brick tone,' and it is evident this master's works are as hard and dry as enamel. The fact is, with respect to colours, when laid on in cool, tender tones, in perfect imitation of natural freshness, it is not, and it ought not to be, necessary to their permanent truthfulness, that they should always retain an actual moisture. For instance, a dew-drop by a Dutch painter will always look like a dew-drop, however hard and dry the colours may become.

Look at the best preserved pictures of Jacob Ruysdael. Their calm, soft airiness, subdued sunlights, and quiet shades, still possess all we can conceive of intense beauty. The pictures of Ruysdael are as opposite, in their simple chasteness, to the splendid allegories of Rubens, as the mellow notes of a solitary flute to the outburst of an orchestra. Yet Ruysdael's representations of woods, lanes, villages, waterfalls, and scenes on the ocean, have not, as far as we can guess, been despoiled of a single charm. Again, look into the interiors of Adrian Ostade; you may almost guess the hour of the day with no other guide save the lights,

reflections, and shadows. Thus you imagine in one picture it is three o'clock on a summer afternoon, and the boor on the ale-house bench is dozing over his after-dinner cup. Or, in another picture, in which the painter has represented himself at work, that it is early morning, by the cheerful sunlight which steals so calmly into the apartment; you feel the desire to step across the room and look through the old-fashioned window into the garden. You feel sure there is a garden without, nay, that it is the month of June, and that the painter's roses are in full bloom. Such are the nice distinctions of light, shade, and tint yet preserved in the pictures of Adrian Van Ostade.

These instances of durability of colours in the works of the old painters are taken almost at random. The same quality would be found to exist in the greater proportion of pictures in any choice collection. The earliest specimens of Italian pictures in distemper are mostly very solid and pure in colour—that is, where a direct cause for their decay, such as gross exposure, has not existed. The pictures of Taddeo Gaddi, in the National Gallery, present an instance of colours which have survived the influence of time, through a period of nearly five hundred years. In the representation of 'Saints in Glory,' those early pictures display a great variety of colours, and frequently very striking and beautiful effects of sunlight. The blues and reds have often an enviable degree of purity, depth, variety, and force, even when compared with less ancient productions.

It is commonly observed that portions of old paintings are in good preservation, while other parts of the same pictures are almost obliterated, the obliterations having been occasioned either by accident, neglect, or

wilful, bad treatment. The cartoons of Raphael, at Hampton Court, are a painful case in point. If the whole series of that work had been preserved, as, by chance, some favoured parts have been, it is clear that the whole would now be almost as perfect as when they left the master's pencil.

CHAPTER III.

ANTIPATHY TO PICTURE RESTORATIONS.

N the spring of 1854, on the abatement of the controversy on picture restoration, the author wrote the following protest against the unphilosophical spirit in which the controversy had been conducted.

If the apparent verdict of public opinion is to be credited, the picture restorers' art is abolished in England. The restorers are in danger of being driven from our public galleries. These unostentatious conservers of the works of genius are described as 'picture rats ;' their studies are styled 'shambles ;' their careful and patient manipulations, 'systematic and wanton destructiveness.' In these controversies the non-restorationists always assume that cleaning pictures means no less than scrubbing out the pictures themselves—repairing small blemishes they regard merely as a pretext for repainting entire works ; lining, battening, cradling, and transferring have received no sort of recognition. But will not this judgment suffer reversal when the public shall become practically informed upon it ? Vituperation in art is no more likely to produce lasting conviction or intelligent satisfaction than in other party controversies. A discussion of critics which has triumphed by assuming an utter want of conscientiousness, reason, devotion, or skill on the part of their opponents (the restorers) can never retain its victory—unless art controversies are privileged to be conducted without discrimination or

justice. Take the matter in merely a popular point of view—for the appeal lies from the critics to the people. Does it stand to common reason that the dark, unsightly blotch on the serene sky is preferable to the subtlest imitation of the true tint which the ablest artist can produce? Are the soft shadows broken up and disfigured by patches of ghastly white (pieces having fallen out, laying bare the ground)? We are not to stop the cavities with binding cement and tint the eyesores into harmony with the rest, but submit to contemplate the picture under the distracting influence of these disfigurements. If the panel has become rent, we are to let it remain until the crack becomes widened into a chasm. In many instances a century will suffice to render every thread of the canvas which supports the masterpiece sufficiently brittle to crumble to dust at the slightest touch, and it has only been by lining old canvases upon new that the chief pictures of the great masters now hang on our walls entire. It is rare to find an old canvas picture which has not received the benefit of lining—and not unfrequently the process has several times been repeated. To line a picture properly, is to renew the lease of its existence for a century. A corresponding care is indispensable to the preservation of old pictures painted on wood. Through the labours of the ever-active tooth of the worm, and other agents, few works of the great Roman master would have descended to these times but for their timely transfer from the worn-out timber on which they were painted to other and sounder material.

Mr. Buchanan informs us that M. Hacquin, of Paris, transferred the chief pictures of Raphael, including the 'Madonna del Pesche,' the 'Elizabeth receiving the Virgin,' the famous work known as the

Pearl of Raphael, the 'Holy Family,' in which the angel scatters flowers, and the well-known picture entitled 'St. Cecilia,' together with the 'Martyrdom of St. Peter,' by Titian. These pictures were not placed in the hands of the renovator until their 'utter ruin' became the only alternative—and thus were these *chef-d'œuvre* of art rescued from the dust. The large picture in our National Gallery, by Sebastian del Piombo (on the authority of Mr. John Landseer), was found to need transferring. And let it not be overlooked that hundreds of old painters painted on the same kind of timber as Raphael, and that their works have suffered from the same casualties, and, in important cases, received the same treatment. Services of this kind may be appreciated without the possession of a profound knowledge of painting.

‘If neither brass nor marble can withstand
The mortal force of Time’s destructive hand,’

it is easier to ascertain the liabilities of mere canvas and timber.*

The author being on a visit to an enthusiastic collector of pictures, and observing many valuable specimens of the old schools in a very dilapidated condition, took occasion to elicit his opinion with respect to the restoration of damaged pictures, and of the persons usually employed to repair them. It was at once evident that the very mention of 'restoration' was sufficient to disconcert the ardent lover of the picture art.

‘Sir,’ said he, ‘I am happy to say there is not a

* Author’s letter, *Athenæum*, No. 1371.

picture in my collection which has been cleaned and repaired.'

Of this there was no want of proof. Some of the early Italian pictures were chipped, and large pieces, loosened by heat or damp, had dropped from the panels, in which worms, the growth of a warmer clime, had been busy for centuries. Our collector, being asked if he considered restoring old pictures advisable under extreme circumstances, prescribed extreme penalties for any one who should have the temerity to entertain the idea.

'Could anything be more absurd,' he insisted, 'than for a modern dauber to scrub, plaster up, and repaint an old picture?'

'Certainly not.'

'Very well, then,' continued he, 'would you have some image maker commence operations on the Elgin marbles, wash and scrub them, plaster up the chinks, replace the absent limbs, remodel the obliterated features, and, in a word, restore them? What would you think of such a proceeding? How great would be your indignation! How would you mourn the loss of Phidias, and curse the miscreant who could so abuse the sublime productions of that Athenian chisel. Thus should I feel if some officious hand, some restorer, should attempt to practise his remorseless craft upon yonder noble specimen—the gem of my collection—a Leonardo da Vinci.'

As respects fragments of ancient sculpture, the views of our enthusiast possess some show of reason, but are, at the same time, full of exaggeration; while the comparison between old pictures and ancient sculptures is far from being happy. If the lost member of a mutilated Apollo could be found, there could be no

difference of opinion as to the propriety of its resuming its original position. If a *Venus* stood complete in every limb, in good preservation throughout, with the exception that some unfortunate blow had struck out one eye, in consequence of which blemish the whole statue was affected, and its influence half destroyed—what objection would there be, could some modeller replace the absent member so cleverly that all traces of the injury should disappear, and the figure again possess its full and complete effect? Surely no one could object to such a course being taken? But because the eye could be replaced (the other remaining to test its accuracy), it by no means follows that if the nose were lost that feature could be replaced with equal felicity, for, although men of taste might venture a shrewd guess as to the kind of nose the face once possessed, and sculptors might realise their conception, yet for all that there would be wanting the proof by comparison present in the case of the eye; and where doubt commences interference with the original work should cease, in deference to the original artist. However well founded a conjecture might seem, it were far better to rest with the mutilated form than to risk an absolutely supposititious addition to the fragment. As a matter of speculation, the restoration of a broken figure may be accomplished without risk to the original remnant simply by making a mould of it, and adding the missing portions to the *cast*. Here lies the difference betwixt pictures and statues in respect to their restoration.

We now take an example of the picture art. We have before us an elaborate specimen by Roger of Bruges, representing a Christian knight at his devotions. Those who have seen the best pictures by this

master must have been struck by their singular lustre. The present work has all the luminous appearance of ancient glass windows found in Gothic churches. These beautiful qualities in our example are disfigured by certain absolute blemishes, the most prominent of which arise from four squares of the tessellated pavement, on which the knight is standing, having fallen out, leaving the oak panel visible in the place ; another portion of the work has likewise disappeared, separating the long handle of the spear. The moment the eye is directed to the picture, the whole attention is riveted on these two blemishes. It is in vain that you attempt to realise the picture as a whole, such as it appeared in its perfect state. The first thing that enters the mind of the spectator is how may those blemishes be remedied ? The answer is ready, for the remedy is simple. Some able artist must restore the lost portions of the tessellated floor and the spear. This is not a difficult task, while it is a perfectly safe operation, not involving a particle of the original remains. The restorer has the same aids as the modeller in remodelling the eye in the *Venus*. He proceeds by filling with cement the large holes whence the pieces have dropped ; after this, the cement is scraped level with the surface of the picture ; and then the artist proceeds to sketch and colour the parts to match those adjoining in form and colour, accomplishing this so accurately in tint and texture that the keenest eye may never after discover where the injuries have been. No one will deny the practicability of making restorations of this nature, and surely they are such as not even the original painter would be disposed to reject.

Having shown how large repairs may be accom-

plished without perverting the intention of the master, we will see what can be done for the removal of numerous lesser defects. Suppose the picture chosen for illustration to be differently disfigured. A small worm (common to old timber) has hollowed out the panel, and perforated the picture. Thus in the scarlet robe of the knight there are not less than twenty small round holes, six in the face, and many more in the various parts of the representation, making in all about a hundred. If it were practicable to fill up a cavity of the size of four squares of the tessellated floor, it might seem an easy matter to fill up tiny holes no larger in circumference than small shot. Insignificant as these small worm holes may appear singly, a hundred of them dispersed over a surface of twenty-four inches by sixteen are sufficient to have a very damaging influence. Yet these holes may be filled and tinted by the fine point of a sable pencil, so as to mingle the specks with the neighbouring colours, thus restoring the painting to its original completeness. It will be borne in mind that the whole of the processes described and recommended are performed, not on the work of the master, but over cavities. What has been advanced respecting these small openings made by worms, and their repair, holds good also of other injuries to which pictures are liable. Cracks, rents, and fissures may all be remedied by the same process. There are scarcely any old paintings which have not received from time to time attentions of this kind. One would think that such services rendered to art would need no justification. Nor indeed would any defence have been necessary, had it not happened that unskilful and impatient hands have often been employed to make these essential reparations—who,

instead of confining themselves within bounds to the particles of damage, to save time, or to hide their inability to match the colours, have painted over whole works. Proceedings of this unscrupulous nature have been frequent, and have come to throw discredit on the art of restoration; and the able, conscientious restorer suffers in the general censure.

Mr. Lance, the eminent fruit painter, was 'instructed by the Keeper of the National Gallery to restore the "Boar Hunt" by Velasquez.' Mr. Lance (before a Committee of the House of Commons) thus described the injuries in the picture of the 'Boar Hunt' which he was commissioned to repair:—'One portion on the right hand—as large as a sheet of foolscap—of the picture was entirely bare. In fact, more than half the picture had to be restored.' Witness 'had not seen the picture before it was damaged,' nor had he had 'any plate to aid him in his restoration.'

It is an unaccountable error to set aside as worthless the fragment of a noble picture like the 'Boar Hunt'; and surely repainting such a work is scarcely more to be preferred than its destruction. We justly attach great importance to mutilated statues—we do not discard an imperfect frieze; and there is no reason why fragmentary examples of the pencil should not be valued in a corresponding degree. It must be evident that the attempt to restore a picture half effaced ought never to have been made. Picture restoration has its limits. Mr. Lance had no engraving to aid him in his restoration of the said picture; nor, indeed, had he more than the merest conjecture of the appearance of the picture before it had become injured. Hence, in restoring more than half, he overstepped the defensible limits of restoration, and chance usurped the place of

law. In such extreme cases of injury the safe rule is, not to exceed such mechanical appliances as refer simply to the preservation of the fragment, as a fragment. The restorer might venture to tint in the damaged portions matching the original ground colour; thus leaving blanks, comparatively inoffensive, as if the master had desisted from his work, deferring certain portions to be completed on a future occasion.*

Not a few instances are recorded of eminent painters who have attempted to immortalise themselves by painting on the canvases of the old masters. It was with the deepest indignation that Barry beheld an Italian repainting—the famous wreck at Milan—of the ‘Last Supper,’ by Leonardo Da Vinci. Carlo Marratti took upon himself to insert three Cupids in an ancient picture of Venus found in the gardens of Sallust. West did more than was necessary to the ‘Raising of Lazarus,’ by Sebastiano del Piombo. Sometimes whole collections undergo a sort of repainting. Shelley records an instance. Travelling in Italy, he arrived at a convent just as the village plumber, glazier, and painter, was withdrawing his workmen from their task of touching up the old masters, which operation had been included in the contract for renovating the paint and whitewash of the holy edifice. Instances like this last are but too common in secluded parts of Catholic countries, where poverty and ignorance accompany the possession of the rarest treasures of art. The difficulty is to understand how a modern painter of any reflection can commit the blunder of supposing that an old picture is worth anything after having been daubed over by a foreign hand.

* Author’s letter in the *Athenæum*.

CHAPTER IV.

PICTURE CLEANING.

CLEANING pictures is a complicated and serious matter. It is a subject to be approached with caution. The operations necessary cannot be so well defined as can those relating to artistic repairs. However, a distinguished senator, Mr. Drummond, in a speech delivered in the House of Commons, July 1, 1854, thus defines what he considered to be the popular method of cleaning the works of the old masters:—‘They (the government) bought pictures, and with a pound or two of pumice stone, set themselves to rub them all out.’ This summary mode of treating the question of picture cleaning is open to the same objections as the process it condemns.

Is it possible to clean old *dirty* pictures with beneficial results, and without injury to the original tints and touches? ‘No,’ exclaims ‘A Tory in Art,’ in the *Times*; ‘it is as idle to talk of restoring a picture to what it was, as to try and push back the iron hand of time. We must make up our minds to put up with a certain amount of dirt, and study the works of departed genius through the warm haze of time.’ Much may we profit by the contemplation of delicate beauties—as they appear through a dark crust of dirt! We may venture the assertion that the old masters would be the first to object to the present dingy condition of their productions. The questions here to be asked are, ‘Did the old painters calculate that their pictures would come to need cleaning?’ and ‘Did they make

any provision to that end?' Certainly they did. When oil painting first came into use, one of its useful virtues, as noted by the painters of the time, was, that it would *wash*. Long before Italian pictures were remarkable for correct drawing or harmonious colouring, painters had manifested anxiety for the future preservation of their works. Antonio da Messina, about the year 1494, seeing an oil picture of John Van Eyck's at Naples, and perceiving that 'it might be washed with water without suffering any injury,' was so satisfied of the advantages of oil painting over the old method of colouring in distemper, that he immediately set out for Bruges, and there, by presents and services, succeeded in prevailing on John Van Eyck to divulge his precious secret. It is recorded that the art of painting in oil thus found its way into Italy. Any how, there is no want of evidence that the early Italian painters were desirous that their pictures should be so painted that they might afterwards be kept clean and sightly. We find the venerable Leonardo da Vinci speculating on a method of painting a picture 'that will last for ever.' This durability was to be ensured by a layer of glass placed over the picture, so as to preserve it from the action of the air. We find varnishes of some sort in repute as far back as the year 1410, after which time they came into general use, and have continued so to the present day.

When we wish to preserve a print with its white margin from dust, we place a glass over it, and there is no doubt that painters, ever since the invention of oil painting, have been accustomed to varnish their pictures with a view to the preservation of the colours. There can be no question of the long and general use of varnishes, or of the one sole reason for their use.

Had varnishes always kept as hard, clear, and durable as glass, the preservation of the works of the old painters had been an easy matter; but, unfortunately, the colours of many of the finest pictures are rendered almost invisible by the discolouration and cracking of the varnishes themselves. The simple removal of these injurious incrustations is the work of the modern picture cleaner.

CHAPTER V.

THE VARNISH GLAZE THEORY.

THE chief and most plausible of the numerous objections which have been urged against the practicability of cleaning pictures, turns upon the possibility of injuring a *glaze* alleged to have been commonly employed by the old painters. In the *Times* controversy on this subject in 1852, 'An Artist' made the following remark :—'The process of painting a picture which is the most difficult is the final glazing. Indeed, it is the only part which absolutely requires the hand and eye of the master.' Thus, 'An Artist' would have us believe that Raphael is famous more by virtue of his colouring and chiaro-oscuro than his drawing. We apprehend that pictures of the Roman master challenge our admiration by virtue of very different qualities than mere tone, or richness, or even harmony of colouring. Rather might it not be said that Raphael's pictures will still command their high place when the tints and glazing are faded away, and only the 'dim, dream-like forms' remain ?

'An Artist' may have been thinking of the Flemish school. If so, who for a moment imagines that Rubens' masterpiece, the 'Descent from the Cross,' in the cathedral of Antwerp, owes its influence to a 'glaze ?' The master speaks in every touch of the pencil, and the timid hand of the pupil is nowhere to be seen. Even the pictures by Vandyke which hang around it dwindle into shadows by comparison. It may, indeed, be doubted if the 'Descent from the

Cross' was ever glazed in the manner described. To those who have inspected the picture, the various colours appear to have been laid on with a bold, light, fearless, flowing hand—each touch in the right place, with little after toning, softening, or blending. We have, in some sort, the authority of Rubens himself for asserting that the 'glaze' (which 'An Artist' thinks the only part of the process of painting a picture 'requiring the hand and eye of the master') was by Rubens seldom employed. Rubens, in the process he has so elaborately described, makes no mention of a final 'glaze.' He speaks of 'decided touches' as the final 'distinguishing marks of a great master,' by which he cannot possibly mean the kind of toning or colouring in varnish which 'An Artist' describes. If a painter requires rich, transparent crimson, he produces it by washing transparent lake over a light tint, previously prepared and become dry. This, properly speaking, is 'glazing,' and is certainly not usually regarded as the last and final process. The greater proportion of the colours in a picture of the school of Rubens, would prove to be thus obtained. This process of producing luminous effects of light, shade, and colour, constitutes the entire process of painting a fine picture in oil, and requires 'the hand and eye of the master,' from first to last, to weigh well the nature of the ground tints over which transparent colours are intended to be passed.

The more skilful the artist the less need is there for scumbling, toning, or any final operation to unite the component parts into a 'whole.' The skilful artist conceives and executes each part of his design, so that consistency shall be the result, without the necessity of toning down one colour and heightening another, or of

painting out portions and supplying others, practices which, when common, mark the indecision, or caprice, or inability, of the amateur, rather than the progressive process of the master.

The amateur stands in frequent need of erasing false lines and ill-matched tints; wanting foresight, he is necessitated to resort to all kinds of trickery to harmonise the bits and patches of his compositions. Compositions which present the finest effects of colour are usually those in which the tints (as in the 'Descent from the Cross' at Antwerp) are left undisturbed in virgin purity, bespeaking spontaneity of thought and action, the hand having obeyed the warm impulse of the imagination. Where the work of an incompetent journeyman is to be foisted on a patron for the master's production, it becomes necessary for the master to do something to ensure the success of the imposition. Hence, the main body of paint being laid on by the underling, the more dexterous hand is called into requisition to correct and patch, to erase and blot, to darken and lighten, as may be needed—in fact, to tinker a bad picture, so that it will at least pass muster with over-partial and credulous collectors. From this miserable fashion (sometimes resorted to) of supplying the market with the works (?) of popular painters has sprung the belief entertained by 'An Artist,' that masters of renown *always* leave the work to their pupils, and take the credit to themselves.

The *Times*' correspondent not only infers that all the old masters used a glaze in the completion of their pictures; he also determines the composition of the said glaze, as we learn from the following extract. Speaking of the process of picture cleaning, he says:— 'It does not consist in merely removing the dust and

dirt that may have accumulated on the surface of a picture, but is the taking off a coat of chilled or discoloured varnish ;' and he adds—‘ But what will take off *one coat of varnish* will take off *another coat of varnish* immediately underneath *the first*, into which a little transparent colour has been added [infused].’

Allowing for a moment that this glazing was always resorted to, the theory of glazing oil pictures with varnish colour is not likely to have been much practised, as the joint use of oil colour and varnish colour, the one immediately upon the other, necessarily results in disunion and cracking of the surface. It is commonly asserted that Francis Mieris and Gaspard Netscher finished their pictures in a varnished medium, and the singular transparency and smoothness of their productions would seem to bear out the assertion. De’ Piles (the chief authority in the matter) thus describes the Netscher practice :—‘ When he (Netscher) intended to give the last hand to his piece, he rubbed it over with varnish which did not dry in two or three days ; and *during that time he had leisure to manage his colours over and over to his liking* ; those especially that, being neither too hard nor too liquid, were the more easily united to those which he added anew.’ Now, it is a characteristic of slow-drying varnishes that they dry exceedingly hard, and that, *once dry*, they are altogether as difficult to dissolve. Properly speaking, the Netscher varnish was not varnish at all. Any how, a coat of brittle mastic, or common dirt, might be removed from pictures so painted without risk. De’ Piles is borne out by a practical view of the case. It would have been simply impossible for Netscher to have handled an almost inconceivably fine pencil if he had employed a stubborn, quick-drying liquid to moisten

his colours. Thus the danger in cleaning a picture which 'An Artist' fears is only contingent on certain conditions. If a picture is varnished with the same varnish as that used to complete the picture, then cleaning would be dangerous indeed. Such instances would form the rare exceptions, rather than the general rule. Why are pictures almost always varnished with mastic? Not only to brighten the tints, and to preserve them from dirt and atmospheric changes, but chiefly, as every artist is aware, on account of the practicability of removing mastic from oil colours without their being injured by the operation of the removal. The only condition being that the oil colours shall have become thoroughly hardened before the varnish is applied, in order to prevent its too close incorporation with the colours.

This varnish glaze theory was selected as the most critical point for testing the possibility of picture cleaning; and it can be confidently asserted that the difficulty and risk said to attend the removal of varnish from the surfaces of pictures do not present themselves in those very pictures where risk is most to be expected—to wit, in those of the Netscher class.

Few restorers will attempt to clean pictures not originally intended to bear the necessary process. Painters, with few exceptions, qualify their pictures for such contingencies. There are some who have slighted precautions of this kind; but it has always been a source of regret when fine pictures have been found disqualified to undergo what must ever be considered an essential operation—if the eye has to be gratified and the understanding satisfied.*

* Author's letter, *Athenæum*, No. 1374.

‘An Artist’ cites the current practice of the continent in support of his varnish and colour ‘glazing theory.’ Thus, he says—‘It is well known that many pictures, attributed, and justly too, to certain artists, were painted, except *this last glaze*, by their pupils. This practice prevails on the continent to the present day.’ ‘An Artist’ further informs us that the performance of this last glaze ‘Rubens or Delacroix would not think of entrusting to his favourite élève.’ One would certainly conclude that the pupil who had accomplished all but the final ‘glaze’ of a picture, and was then entrusted to *add that*, might justly lay claim to the entire production. Is it reasonable to suppose that a master, however expert, could take up the crude performance of a pupil, and metamorphose it into a masterpiece by the aid of varnish, into which ‘a little transparent colour has been infused?’ The fact is, the class of goods referred to, being the joint work of master and man, are commonly very well known, and very little valued, by distinguished judges. As in Rembrandt’s case, they are detected and condemned. Rubens was not the artist to deprive a pupil of his rights. Animals, landscapes, and still-life inserted in his pictures by contemporary painters, were always publicly ascribed to those painters. So with Raphael. He allotted certain compartments of work to pupils of suitable talent. Thus in the Vatican, Polidoro had the friezes to execute. It is easy to charge great men with unjust practices. But the old masters are not likely to have much followed a rule which could only have been unjust alike to their patrons, their pupils, and to themselves. To talk of the practice of ‘the continent,’ is taking a wide latitude, and seems to imply the possession of vast information. This uniformity of practice in conti-

mental studios we take to be of a piece with the country bookbinder's notion of uniformity, who, being requested by a gentleman to bind a large number of books in a uniform style, replied—‘Leave them to me, sir ; and depend upon it there shall not be two alike.’

CHAPTER VI.

STANDARD, PICTURES.

THE number, variety, and condition of pictures by the old masters, would seem to leave no hope of accomplishing their classification ; but, in other subjects of scientific inquiry, much greater difficulties have been surmounted, and distinct departments prescribed. What is wanted is an analysis and classification of pictures for the use of the restorer, to the end that he may proceed with his work with precision. Hitherto, in the absence of such a guide, his operations have been too much at the mercy of chance. It is quite possible to determine the peculiarities of certain pictures which constitute them the representatives of a class for the special purpose of the cleaner. As an illustration we will take Backhuysen, who, as a painter of sea pieces, ranks with Vandervelde. The difference in quality of execution between these two painters is not great, but they exhibit marked dissimilarity of style. Both present the same subject effectively, but by a different process, as respects the manner of laying on the colours, and in the retention or rejection of minutiae. Vandervelde delights in details, and prides himself on his seamanship with all a sailor's coquetry ; he individualises the perfect model of a ship, defining and elaborating, from his familiar recollections, more than even a sailor's eye can seize at a glance : he supplies what distance would obscure, or storm and battle confound and obliterate. Backhuysen, on the contrary, while he betrays no ignorance of a ship's physi-

ognomy, is content to realise the somewhat broader and more prominent features of his subject. Backhuysen's ships roll heavily, and pitch deeply, and founder fearfully, in the gale or in battle. His pictures look real, and full of motion. For richness of invention, fulness, and completeness of effects, he rivals Vandevelde. Yet, perfect as is the touch of Backhuysen, and complete as are his effects; in minute mechanical dexterity of execution, and in delicacy of tint, he is altogether exceeded by Vandevelde, who, as a portrait painter of ocean life, has no rival. Vandevelde's sea pictures are, in a manner, so comprehensively expressive, that they may be said to include all other pictures of the kind.

The lesson to be derived from this comparison is, that in cleaning pictures by these two masters, the distinctive method of working employed by Vandevelde should be specially understood, for the reason that the means and method which would safely clean a picture by Backhuysen, would destroy a work by Vandevelde, because of its greater delicacy and excessive minuteness. The process which would remove dirt from the more delicate picture, would perhaps answer in all respects for the bolder or coarser. It must be evident that a general rule *can* be drawn for the practice of restoration. In the instance of marine pictures, those examples which contain the greatest amount of refinement of execution in drawing, light, shade, and colour, must be taken as the basis of study. A knowledge of every picture to be operated upon is indispensable, and this would be soonest attainable by the restorer making himself thoroughly acquainted with the distinctive character of the most intricate and perfect works of each class. A knowledge of the works of Vandevelde

would not suffice, perhaps, to qualify a restorer to handle all other sea pictures ; but if choice were made of one master's works to serve as the groundwork of investigation, perhaps no artist's are better than Van-delde's for this purpose.

Take another example, of a somewhat opposite kind, in the pictures of Rubens and Vandyke. It will be inferred that the pictures of Vandyke should serve as a study for a class of pictures painted on principles taught by Rubens. Rubens describes the process of laying on colours which he himself practised, thus :— ‘Begin by painting in your shadows lightly, taking particular care that no white is suffered to glide into them : white is the poison of a picture, except in the lights ; if once your shadows are corrupted by the introduction of this baneful colour, your tones will no longer be warm and transparent. It is not the same in the lights, they may be loaded as much as you think proper ; provided the tones are kept pure, you are sure to succeed in placing each tint in its proper place, and afterwards by a light blending of brush or pencil melting them into each other, without tormenting them ; and on this preparation may be given those decided touches which are the distinguishing marks of a great master.’

The effects of these instructions may be traced in the works of Rubens' best pupil, Vandyke. The master furnished the style, the pupil perfected it ; the master drew the fearless and flowing outline, the pupil, in his works, corrected it of some of its extravagances. A similar distinction may be seen in the colouring of the two painters ; Vandyke (for his great works) spread his palette with the same colours as Rubens, laid on the tints by the same process, but more sparingly, using a smaller pencil, giving them the same pure, un-

sullied look, never 'breaking' nor 'torturing' them; every touch right to its purpose. The rule to be drawn from a knowledge of these two painters is the same as that drawn from Backhuysen and Vandevelde—*i. e.*, the necessity of an acquaintance with the most intricate and delicate pictures of each class. The process that would clean a picture by Rubens might ruin a picture by Vandyke, but the hand that has touched Vandyke without injury, will 'restore' Rubens without danger.

Admitted the restorer should be guided in his operations by the study of set standards from each class of pictures, selected on the principle described, the difficulty of deciding on the proper picture would be very trifling. A little reflection would convince us that Adrian Ostade would include a host of Dutch painters of his class, from Isaac Ostade downwards. Even Teniers might be included in this class, for the simple reason that Teniers had a firmer, broader, and more durable touch than Adrian Ostade; in other words, that one touch of the pencil by Teniers towards describing a boor's face, would do the work of a score of small touches by Adrian Ostade. Now, though the effective single touch of the one might be worth the other's score, it would be twenty times more critical a task (in the process of cleaning) to ensure the safety of the more minute and intricate treatment. For the restorer to reckon a score of minute touches by Ostade to one dash of Teniers' brush would save from harm the works of the one and doubly preserve those of the other. It would be better to reckon four score touches to Ostade than to under estimate the number. It is the more necessary to do this, as the finer the touch the more likely it is to be disturbed, not only from its

smallness, but also because the colour is laid on thinner for fine articulations than for more decisive penciling.

No matter what the class of pictures under treatment by the restorer, their safety can only be ensured by a full apprehension of the painter's peculiar genius and distinctive manipulation. If this be admitted of the sort of pictures referred to, which appeal for the most part to the senses only, how much more emphatically true is it of those works which appeal to the understanding? If there be danger, from ignorance, in the treatment of the works we have cited, how much greater must the danger be when the works of a Raphael are at stake? Those who have only tried their hands in the restoration of a Rubens, Vandyke, Teniers, or Ostade, would be very little in the secret of the rare qualities which raise the Italian so far above the Flemish and Dutch painters as to reduce them, by comparison, to mere caricaturists.

CHAPTER VII.

VANDYKE'S PROCESS OF WORKING.

IN common with the school of Rubens, Vandyke commenced his pictures by painting in the shadows of a transparent brown colour, on a ground of a whitish brown tint. The restorer has reason to note this first transparent wash with as much solicitude as any other part of the process by which the picture was completed. Vandyke's most valued works are those which are most transparent in the shadows; and he commanded this excellent quality by working up the dark parts of the picture before he supplied the lighter. He never confounded them; each had its allotted place, subject to distinct and separate treatment. When the picture was completed, the first shadowings were to be seen in every part of the representation. Thus, for instance, in the trunk of a hollow tree, the moss, or loose pieces of bark, would be loaded with full layers of body colour, according as they were more or less in the light; while the dark, hollow fissures would present nothing but the transparent wash, more or less visible as the nature of the subject required.

Why Vandyke's shadows require so much attention, is owing to their being composed of a thin dark colour, on a light ground, which is easily rubbed off. The fear is, that while cleaning the face, the shadows of the hair, eyes, nose, lips, chin, and ears, may be rubbed and impoverished. This invariably happens when the inexperienced attempt to clean pictures of this class. If they try a portion of a picture by way of experi-

ment, it is usually some light part; successful there, they conclude all is right, proceed indiscriminately with the rest; and so the shadows, which are the chief cause of the brilliancy of the colours, vanish in an instant. In lieu of the intelligent-life-like face, nothing remains but an empty and meaningless mask, the mere ghost of the departed picture.

It is the peculiar transparency in Vandyke's shadows that prevents his best works from being successfully copied. Copies may be known by the absence of this quality. Vandyke calculated the process of the picture from first to last, and estimated the effect of every touch. The power to do this seldom or never belongs to the copyist.

The English landscape painter who delights in picturing the pebbled brook, with its fringe of hawthorn and willow, with its sunlit, chequered surface teeming with flowers, very soon learns by experience that he cannot produce on canvas the effects which he sees, but by securing transparent shadows. The lily, that glows and appears so pure while resting on the bosom of the water, if plucked and laid upon an opaque surface, loses its pure and glowing tenderness. So it is with the light opaque tints of a picture; unless they have a foil in shadows of an opposite quality, they never appear fresh and beautiful. However the uninitiated may pass them by, the artist cannot be too mindful of the shaded parts of his picture. The bright or light parts of natural objects appear to fix the whole attention of the uncultivated, who give to the quiet portions, or the shadows, little consideration. Careless observers do not note that, in fine pictures, shadows are of several kinds, transparent or not, according to the nature of the object shaded; and that they are of

many degrees of darkness, and of various colours ; that they are ruled by regular laws, and subject to numerous irregularities, in respect to tone and colour, and the fluctuation of lights and changing hues reflected from surrounding objects. To the uninitiated, there is a dark side of the picture and a light side of the picture, simply. From such, the light side attracts the greatest share of attention, merely because it usually displays the most attractive colours and the chief portion of the subject, not because there is most art in that part of the picture—not because the artist surmounted the greatest difficulties in the brighter half of the scene ; for, although less noted by ordinary observers, the shadows in high-class pictures are the result of infinite pains. To the management of the shadows every form is indebted for its relief, and every colour for its variety, force, and lustre. The shadows of a picture by Correggio might become many degrees darker, the fainter ones be altogether obliterated, and few would detect the absence and loss of them ; but if a decided defect, a blot or a stain, however small, existed in any of the light parts, a child would almost discover it. If a person, indifferently conversant with art, wishes to trace the merits of a picture, he fixes his attention on the lights, and never considers the shadows. If an uninformed person attempt to clean a picture, the dark parts are probably either deemed inconsiderable, and escape unmolested, or get removed, especially if they be of that transparent, luminous, space-creating kind just now referred to, as peculiarly excellent in the works of Vandyke.

Rich stuffs, which make up the draperies in some of this master's compositions, owe their intense beauty, variety of colour, and reflections, to washings of trans-

parent colour, the one over the other, repeated until the depth and various degrees of richness were obtained. These washes of transparent colour sometimes extended even to the flesh. It is necessary to consider these glazings attentively, for they are not less susceptible of injury than the shadows first laid on, being produced by an exactly similar process.

The next portions of the picture to be considered are the greys, or the transition lights of the flesh. In a portrait of Charles the First, Vandyke furnished a very perfect example of the management of these lights. In this instance, beside breaking the sharp-edged angle, and blending the forehead into the half shadows of the temple, the grey lights also serve by contrast to give an additional beauty to the flesh tints.

These grey lights are given in Vandyke's works with great precision, and form a distinct and peculiar feature in the school of Rubens. In Vandyke they are most delicate, and are very evident upon close inspection, but soften to the eye when the picture is seen from a proper distance, whence they have all the appearance of real lights, such as (under happy circumstances) the cultivated eye detects in natural objects.

With the transition lights may be included those reflected ones, which are certain almost imperceptible illuminated parts relieving the objects from the background, as on the dark side of the face where it melts into the space beyond.

We have asserted that Vandyke's execution, in large works, resembled his master's. The pupil, however, not unfrequently relied on the use of the 'softener.' He knew how to blend or caress his tints into harmony, without hazarding their purity. Fu-

sell, speaking of the management of the palette, says—‘ Two colours make a tint; three, mud.’ Vandyke knew this, and avoided the evil. It was only in the portraits of fair women that he seems to have thought a soft texture an indispensable refinement. In thus much, then, he differs from Rubens, whom he excels in a certain melting tenderness imparted to his colours.

The works of Rubens and Vandyke are like similar flowers of different culture. Those of Rubens growing in the open air and sunlight, bold, masculine, and strong; those of Vandyke forced beneath glass by artificial heat, fragile, slender, and graceful. The same structure is in both—the difference is only one of development. Nothing is more obvious than the necessity of being specially mindful of the more delicate, so that in a general calculation those pictures most susceptible of injury (as Vandyke’s in the school of Rubens) may be most cared for.

Vandyke has been described as working with certainty and niceness of calculation, with a consciousness of certain results from a consistent process; yet even he, on the completion of a picture, found it necessary to revise and retouch minute particulars omitted in the regular process. The restorer should always assume the existence of these small concluding touches. They are small but important corrections, niceties of expression suggested by after reflections, minute particularisations necessary to definiteness or to break anything too marked—in fact, critical retouchings. In contemplating a picture by Vandyke, the spectator does not perceive (it was not intended that he should) a thousand nice discriminating points in every feature—in eye, nose, mouth, and chin; not only to make each perfect in itself, but chiefly to harmonise the whole.

All this after care was essential to satisfy the connoisseur, the physiognomist, the artist, and the anatomist—to define all differences of age and sex, and the various peculiarities of character, and the qualities of human nature.

Some would suggest that it were better to make Rembrandt, as the greatest artist of shadow painting, the master whose works should form the basis of these remarks; but it has been thought necessary to ask for that painter a separate place in the consideration of the restorer. The works of Rembrandt demand to be objects of special contemplation, and to be studied one by one, apart. Each is a distinct drama, self-contained.

CHAPTER VIII.

SPECIAL CASES FROM REMBRANDT.

{T is often thought surprising that the works of the barbarous Fleming should rank in the connoisseur's estimation almost as high as the works of the learned and graceful Raphael ; yet we are much deceived if any painter has done more for the triumph of his art than this grand and solitary miller's son. His pencil recognised the meanest things, and glorified the rags and tatters of the vilest outcast. The vulgar, the hideous, and the repulsive, touched by his pencil, became eloquent and impressive. Misery, vice and crime, desolation and violence, found a ready access to the serene cabinets of the wealthy and refined. The dens of infamy, the haunts of squalor, nay, the horrors of the tomb, even the putrefying corpse, tortured and warped by disease, endowed with a new life and light by the genius of Rembrandt, came to be the delight of palaces, and to exact the homage of Europe.

A heap of stones and a solitary, limping mendicant, painted on a few square inches of wood, will be an object of competition ; collectors swarm around, covet it, and become as children in their unaffected admiration. No word escapes them touching the choice of subject, no one regrets its meanness, no one believes it mean. Such vagabonds as Rembrandt paints, the critics shun in the streets. Every sense is offended by the reality, and yet every beholder is charmed by the transcript. Wherein, then, is this magic which enables the painter so to win the homage of the fastidious ?

Rembrandt's beggars, culprits, and executioners, have the lineaments of the unmitigated realities they picture. Guilt, cunning, avarice, and infamy, are stereotyped in every line of the face. Were they alive, we should turn aside, nor suffer them to start up in our paths, infest our streets, and prowl about our homes. Living, they baffle the intelligent, and overawe the proud ; but in the pictures of Rembrandt they captivate and charm. What transformation have these objects undergone at the painter's hands that they appeal to sight with all this fascination ? The choice of subject certainly cost the painter no effort, but his whole art was exhausted in the setting, in making it effective, in rendering it *dramatic* in the fullest sense of that term.

The art of Rembrandt, considered in respect to design, consists in giving to each character of his selection the lineaments that truly belong to it. His lines go home to the truth ; they express all, and no more ; they never exaggerate. If they are forcible, it is because they are accurate. If the forms they delineate are hideous, it is because the models were deformed ; if they lack beauty and gracefulness, it is because the sitters whom the artist affectioned, excelled in ugliness. It is the same with his colours. They are all truth, uncompromising truth. The flesh looks like flesh, and nothing else beside. You need no simile to explain what his colouring is like. Fix upon the local colours of any object, take into consideration the sort of light in which they are seen, and they are truthful to a shade. They are always vivid, never staring. He knew the precise degree in which the contrast of opposing tints was to be risked, when it produced variety and force, and when its results were confusion and vulgarity. He could give tangible

existence to the fleeting hues and transient effects of light and darkness, with as much ease as ordinary Dutch painters transcribed the appearance of fixed objects. He revelled like an adept in the shadows of the night, peered wistfully into the solemn darkness, and drew order and system out of the portentous chaos. By the blaze of torch, or the wavering embers, he saw in the profound gloom immensity of space. And whatever of interest or of wonder the eye comprehended, the hand as readily expressed.

The chief works of the Roman school may be compared to the rare books which occasionally issue from our universities. It is the good fortune of the few to appreciate the refinement of essays, uniting at once genius and fine scholarship. The best models in ancient literature are digested by the classic author of to-day in precisely the same spirit in which Raphael might have contemplated the choice statues and medallions of antiquity. To these Raphael owed the majesty and gracefulness of his designs. Whoever would fully realise the wonderful efforts of his pencil must, to some extent, qualify himself by an appropriate course of study. The same models which adorned the studio of the painter, and the same books which suggested the subjects of his noble compositions, now exist within the reach of all. Hence it would be nothing extraordinary if the prince of painters came to be more and more appreciated and reverenced as the multitude shall become better informed on the principles of ancient art. But what shall we say of Rembrandt, whose works are not referable, in the same way, to widely accepted standards? We do not hesitate to assert that the time will come when his genius will be recognised

as legitimate, just as the once erratic comet has become recognised amid the orderly phenomena of the celestial system. There are a class of painters whose works, while not remarkable for very great defects, are neither possessed of very striking excellencies. These will pass away, while Rembrandt, with all his faults and disregard of 'proprieties,' will live by virtue of his incomparable and inherent beauties.

Look at that small, and, at first glance, insignificant, picture entitled 'Jacob's Dream.' From the rude heap on which the travel-worn son of Isaac sleeps, up through the opening in the amber clouds, seems to reach away into illimitable distance, a road from earth to heaven, paved with glowing gems. The sleeper is utterly wanting in dignity, a mere pedlar in hob-nailed boots; the angels are faintly sketched in, with ragged wings, mere specks, only distinguishable from the varied shapes of the clouds, which form the interminable archway through the sky. A tranquil light shuts out the gloom, and breathes warmth upon the brief space around the wanderer's pillow, making that dreary wilderness a smiling nook of rest.

Nor was Rembrandt less potent when, at his spell, the calm, sunless daylight flooded his canvas with tranquility. Witness that master work of his at the Hague. The livid-pale corpse and passionless countenances of the physicians, once beheld in their awful solemnity, are never more forgotten. The blank stone slabs, dark with the presence of the living, seem like the tomb and shadowy pall of the departed. And those doctors! Life-blood sparkles in their veins; their eyes are deep and full of thought, and lustrous as the diamond's blaze. The clay-cold dead is as a tablet,

on which may be read the sufferings of the living man. Every vein and artery, in dismal hieroglyphics, proclaims a history of sorrow and of anguish.

Turning to a more homely scene. Here, on the banks of the Skeldt, a solitary hut is reared, protected by a few stunted, weather-beaten trees. Daylight yet lingers on the quaint and friendless home, mingling with the glowing warmth which issues from the half-open door, and glistens on the clean threshold and on the porch. A venerable dame, with wrinkled face, is there. You almost hear her footfall as she moves over the crisp, dry sand. Drearly and forebodingly she comes to steal a last furtive glance over the scene, prior to shutting out the night. As the eye tracks its way along the cheerless shore, broad, massive clouds of luminous, pitchy blackness are visible, gathering all around, and one long streak of lightning rends the gloom, which shrouds the murky sky, and quivers on the sullen waters, unbroken by dot, or speck, or sign of living thing.

Sometimes he reminds us of the sombre and tragic genius of Christopher Marlowe. The light from the horizon is withdrawn; the robbers, equipped and abroad, are ready for their prey. The flicker of the traveller's torch, an unconscious traitor, betrays its bearer to the eye of the chief, who awaits, in gloomy patience, his victim's approach. This is the moment the painter has seized. The scowling crew, in all the mummary of antique garb, savage gesture, and implements of death, stand out in terrible relief. The tall chief, with grizzly beard, keenly parted lips, and louring eye, overshadowed by ample brim and dusky plume, plants his gaunt figure in the front; the rest, in straggling groups, fall into the background, and

gather into dark and threatening clusters—the more remote like jagged rocks which the imagination shapes into demons. A lurid vapour closes in the spot, half revealing a narrow gorge the eye seeks to penetrate in vain. There seems no limit to the scene, which, like the Valley of the Shadow of Death, is full of horrors.

CHAPTER IX.

AN IDEAL PROCESS OF PAINTING.

SUPPOSE for a moment we have the privilege of observing a superior artist at his work. A vase of flowers just brought in from the garden, with all the freshness of the morning on the buds, leaves, and blossoms—roses, white and red ; hyacinths, white, purple, and pink ; soft, rich, deep-tinted African marigolds ; and tall tulips, pure white, and striped with crimson and scarlet, and petals dusted with gold. Children sporting with a goat are delicately sculptured on the vase. The painter has completed his outline. The lines are faintly indicated, so as to be just perceptible ; being first drawn on a sheet of thin paper, and traced through with a needle on to a panel as smooth and white as the paper itself.

Spreading his palette with pure white and lamp black, finely ground, and selecting a few good sable pencils, the painter proceeds to relieve by shadows the vase, slab, and flowers, from the flat surface. He accomplishes this with great nicety by the admixture of black and white ; realising in form and texture every fine distinction of character which the various subjects present, and doing this so effectively that even the practised eye could scarcely detect an oversight or inaccuracy in the transcript. If it were possible to metamorphose the realities of the variegated flowers, marble slab, and antique vase into forms of driven snow, then would the representation bear strict resemblance to the original objects ; soft, delicate shadows,

and every graceful and various quality having been rendered in perfect unison. Satisfied with his work thus far, the artist next arranges his light from the window of the studio, so as to let a sunbeam fall upon the prominent objects of the group. The change in the light makes it necessary to pass a tender shadow across the picture, so as to leave those parts on which the sunbeam falls, the lighter by comparison. This management of the shadows is a refinement which may be pursued to a very intricate degree, but in this instance the track of sunlight would produce an effect simple to imagine. We observe some flowers in splendour, and others quiet, cool, and retired. The vase of flowers is placed just within the opening of a second chamber, which has only so much cool light diffused over it as serves to make the darkness visible, and this space forms a very effective and soft background, an even contrast, neither too abrupt nor too dark. By this arrangement the whole group is relieved with great force and distinctness. The warm light searches the inmost depths of the open flowers, and peers through every little crevice, filling some with radiance, and fringing others with gold. Swarms of insects are seen sporting about, with fiery coats and wings of various hues, from the fierce and gorgeous dragon-fly to the minute ant; and fresh, pearly drops of dew, fresh as if just fallen from the sky to disappear with the opening day, hang here and there, nestle in the bosom of the rose, glide down the satin surface of the tulip, and drop on the cool, polished marble below, mingling with the mingled colours reflected from above. Each water drop is a little mirror, imaging in little something that is near it; each flower, borrowing a tint from its neighbour, yields its own tint in

return ; the white rose looks more tender and more intense beside the hyacinth's deep blue, and the rich rose reflects its crimson blushes all around.

The painter has succeeded in denoting the various forms composing his subject, in black and white. As at the commencement of the work he devoted his attention to the distinguishing characteristics of each particular form, so now, in the same methodical manner, he proceeds to particularise each colour and its variations. Thus the rose has three or six shades of colour in its blossoms, from the whitish divisions of the young buds to the deep clefts of the mature flowers. The same transparent lake or carmine serves for all ; for he commences with the faintest blush, and then deepens each tint in succession down to the darkest crimson. This process is repeated for every flower and object in the picture. The most subtle tint is thus obtained, whether of blue, yellow, green, or red, including the reflected hues. The treatment which serves for the rose, serves also for the hyacinth, marigold, tulip, and even the smallest leaf or stalk. Thus the utmost purity, freshness, richness, depth, brightness, transparency, and truth are ensured. The painter, having first secured the true colour of each object—that is, its colour before receiving reflections—reserves the reflected hues for after consideration. The purple which the rose attracts from the hyacinth at its side, is obtained by a faint wash of blue, thus changing the tint, with every hue throughout. When the local colours and accidental tints are completed, the pointing is proceeded with. The borders of the flowers and edges of the leaves are tipped with sunlight, which also sparkles on the insects, and gives a central light to the smooth stalks. Those parts which are of a heavy

dead texture, not reflecting light, require retouching with opaque colour to distinguish them from the transparent.

All these beautiful and various effects John Van Huysum could imitate so closely that the imitation seemed to have 'motion and life, and almost an odour.' Whoever feels a pleasure (and who does not?) in gazing at nature's loveliest and most innocent creations.—'a group of beautiful flowers—will readily allow that to look on a picture by John Van Huysum is the next best thing.' There is a feeling so happy in his conceptions of flowers, selected and disposed with the nicest susceptibility to their gentlest influences! He gives to each particular flower, bud, and plant its peculiar character, unruffled by accident. With profusion there is no repletion; grace and simplicity are everywhere.

It may be said that the process of painting a picture after the method particularised has never been pursued—that neither Van Huysum, Mignon, De Heem, nor Baptiste, in fact, pursued such a process; nay, that these painters worked to perfection by means quite different—that their works are more natural, solid, and durable than they would have been if so painted. The writer has seen a picture by Van Huysum in a half-effaced condition, painted on a white ground, in which the tulips and roses were first perfectly formed in white and black. The more elaborate works of Van Huysum were thus worked up. Pictures painted in this manner are very susceptible of injury, owing to the extreme delicacy and thinness of the finishing transparent colours. For this reason it has been thought that a thorough acquaintance with the nature of a picture so hazardous to treat, would be the best

standard to fix in the mind. There would be risk of destroying every beauty in a picture by Van Huysum by use of solvents which might be safely employed in restoring a picture by Baptiste. In a flower-piece by Van Huysum, the faint and scarcely-perceptible blush on the rose is almost as transient as a reflected hue. It is the sensitive eye alone that would be conscious of its presence, and only the delicatest handling that could venture on its surface. In a similar subject by Baptiste, the corresponding tints would not, as in Van Huysum, be produced by a transparent wash, but by opaque colour, which the ordinary eye could not resist, nor the ordinary handling endanger.

CHAPTER X.

IDIOSYNCRACIES OF PICTURE PROPRIETORS.

PICTURE criticisms, by so many deemed matters of capricious taste, might become instructive, if definite rules once aided the judgment; for art is no exception to the law, that interest, appreciation, and refinement, come with the understanding. Compare the remarks of three or four bystanders on any given picture. If the observers are ignorant of the theory and practice of painting, they will exhibit great and perplexing contradictions of opinion; but, in proportion as they happen to be informed of the means and method by which the picture was produced, and of the peculiarities of the master's school, the darkness clears up, principles begin to appear, criticism grows intelligent, and common agreements are manifested. Thus it is with all ordinary questions of science and art, and thus it will be with the art of painting, when the value of right rules and principles shall be properly regarded.

The lines of Pope are specially applicable to those who judge lightly of the character and works of an old painter:—

‘Religion, country, genius of his age—
Without *all these* at once before your eyes,
Cavil you may, but never criticise.’

The pedantic condemn pictures for such anachronisms as that of the painter having put fire-arms into the hands of historical personages who lived a few centuries before the invention of gunpowder—a kind of fault frequently found in the best executed pictures.

Anatomists set aside those productions of the pencil which, in the markings of the muscles, would ill serve the purposes of the medical student. Picture possessors, sensitive with respect to colours, pronounce one picture too blue, another too yellow, a third too red; others have a difficulty in seeing anything distinctly, and, consequently, condemn three pictures out of four as too black, and admire the worst performances solely for their glaring intelligibility. Some, who happen to be near-sighted, prefer small cabinet pieces on account of their minuteness. Others favour only broad generalities, and care for nothing in particular. Some note each separate flower in the hedge-row, and stoop to take the number of blades of grass. Others take things in the mass, and see and feel but the presence of mountain, flood, and valley. There are some who see vulgarity in bright colours, and others give the preference to brown, quiet pictures. Others revel in sunshine, purple, and gold, and turn from sombre objects with instinctive dislike. There is every conceivable difference in the liking and disliking of subjects. Some have all their sympathies with animals, others (at various periods) with still life, fish, flesh, fowl, or fruit, flowers, insects, and shells. Some delight in marine pictures, others in the march of armies. Some are disposed to reflect on religious pictures, and others rejoice in festive scenes. Here one consults the canvas for historic truths, and values the common-place and the actual; there one ponders over the mysterious allegory, which delights him the more because it is obscure. Another cause of dislike, or indifference, to some pictures, is the disposition on the part of many collectors to determine upon ideals of face and form: making no allowance for the national, religious, or moral bias of the painter,

they find fault with all works which do not answer to their preconceived notions. Thus the glowing groups of Venetian masters yield infinitely more satisfaction to some than the simple and graceful beings of Raphael, or the severe and energetic forms of Angelo. In these latter times, there is a great demand for mere prettiness. This is carried so far, that the lines of divine intelligence in woman's countenance (so foppery wills it) challenge disrespect rather than admiration, so that the Sybils themselves scarcely escape contempt. Whereas there are a select few whose predilections favour the ugly and monstrous; and with them every conceivable abortion comes, very consistently, under the head of the graphic or picturesque. Pursuing this theory, it has even been urged in print that faces on which the small-pox has left its indelible marks, are more delightful than those which rival in texture the smoothest alabaster. Then there is that feeling of virtuous indignation levelled against pictures conceived to have an immoral tendency. These find no sympathy with those who renounce the flesh in the thorough-going fashion. Cumberland relates how famous pictures of this order have been prized or condemned by turns, as the fit was on, in the Spanish dominions. A pious princess once caused several pictures of this class to be cut in pieces. Heine relates that a Quaker, having taken fright at a work by Giulio Romano, spent a fortune in its purchase, in order to have the pleasure of burning it. This fanaticism exists to a dangerous extent. Yet even in this delicate department of connoisseurship, we meet with a discriminating liberality which tolerates the class of pictures referred to, and admires the artist when it cannot justify the man.

There exist a class of people to whom the old

masters of painting are as nought—for whom the walls of the Vatican have no sort of interest—for whom the gorgeous views of Venice offer no allurements—those who can regard, unmoved, the women and children of Murillo—to whom the courtly women of Vandyke appear cold and meaningless. Vandyke (writes a famous American authoress) ‘awakens no emotion;’ and of the great Flemish artist, Rubens, the same amiable lady exclaims, ‘his pictures I detest with all the energy of my soul.’

Whole galleries of fine pictures have perished of neglect, arising from an utter indifference to their beauties and ignorance of their worth. It is easier to understand such a state of things in private families, than in public bodies. Pictures bought by and for the public for daily contemplation, ought to be made an example of precaution, which private owners and collectors might follow. For it is too true that here and there the sense of responsibility is dead as regards the preservation of the works of genius, which are in their royal nature a legacy to the nation in which they exist, and to the inhabitants of successive ages.

All these differences of judgment and feeling, with respect to pictures, exist, and owners of pictures so variously disposed may be commonly met with. The fact is, people come to possess pictures through accidental circumstances; and it is an equally contingent circumstance if they happen to understand them, care for them, or know how to treat them. These eccentricities and intolerances will always militate against art until a catholic spirit, the true sentiment of art, becomes universal.

CHAPTER XI.

PROFESSIONAL ADVISERS.

THE connoisseur should never be compelled to follow, unconditionally, the dictum of others respecting the requirements of his pictures. If he consult a number of eminent painters, as to the condition of his pictures, they will probably indulge in vague generalities about art, with very insufficient reference to the peculiarities of the pictures in question. Painters, for the most part, are too much taken up with their own productions, to enter into a minute particularisation of the works of others. Indeed, it could be shown, by a general reference to the best pictures of the English school, that even the ablest of its masters have paid little or no attention to pictures with respect to their preservation and durability. All lovers of art regret the present condition of the chief works of Sir Joshua Reynolds, to which may be added many of Romney's, nearly the whole of Hopner's, and even some of the best portraits by Sir Thomas Lawrence. The contempt of chemical laws in the founders of the English school is much to be wondered at; but the continued neglect by most living artists of a study so eminently called for, is without excuse. Painters of the present day seem to vie with each other in a reckless use of materials, which cannot be expected to last more than a few years. Moreover, painters strictly confine themselves to favourite styles. Palettekni^e, for instance, plasters on the colour in heaps. He has an extraordinary liking for the picturesque—such as

dark lanes, ruined edifices, and wild, barren, deserted places. He has no rival in the art of rendering ragged and jagged appearances of nature. He most delights in the disordered and unaccountable ; and the choice of subject seems to have dictated to him the choice of style, and to have made it necessary for him to employ a trowel, where artists of the old schools used pencils. Paletteknife's peculiar taste, moreover, induces him to look with contempt on the works of those old painters who delighted in rendering common objects in a common-place manner. He thinks those four pictures by Greemer representing the 'Seasons,' very absurd productions. The churches, cottages, and trees, in which you may count every brick, stone, tile, and leaf, together with the crowds of people, dressed as they were in Greemer's time, and occupied, according to their respective stations in life, and in such matters as the particular season or time of day would seem to call for, he gazes at as minor details, insignificant facts, unworthy the notice of an artist and a poet. Then what interest can there possibly be found in those stark-stiff saints, by Albert Durer ? On the other hand (to show that there is not always unanimity of feeling in artists), Camelhair is in downright ecstacies with pains-taking, plodding Greemer, and begs of the fortunate owner the liberty to make a copy of the German master-piece, vowing he never contemplated so rare a specimen before. Paletteknife can only attribute the choice of pictures made by his friend to sheer affectation. Camelhair, in return, bestows a look of despair on his reckless brother, who, despising the examples of the early masters of painting, has struck out an entirely new walk of art, expressly for himself.

Surely the connoisseur, consulting two painters of

such opposite tendencies, with the desire of obtaining information upon the condition of a mixed collection of pictures, would be disappointed. One produces a score of sheep with as many evolutions of the elbow, and trusts to accidental splashes of colour for the rest; the other bestows a month in the elaboration of a wisp of hay, and thinks Gerard Dow must have laboured under excitement when he painted the handle of a besom in four days. Therefore it is that they never agree about anything in connection with art, though in most other matters they seldom differ. Then there is our famous colourist, who, on being consulted about anything connected with old paintings, immediately commences a rhapsody about those famous masters, Giorgione and Titian, interspersed with praises of the great Fleming. Colour, especially Venetian colour, is our modern Tintoretto's forte; he has a passion for colour; his happiest thoughts are all in Venice, whose painters are the sources of his inspiration. All other cities, and all other painters (excepting the great Fleming), are to him of no consideration. Even when his favourite masters are at stake, he is somewhat too vague, and his observations seldom have that closeness necessary for practical purposes. Should the lover of the old masters consult the great modern landscape painter, the 'prophet of Nature,' as he has been termed, one can hardly conceive it possible that he would condescend to answer trifling questions about damaged pictures of low Dutch, German, Flemish, and Italian schools. Nor is it too much to say that the old schools of painting are insignificant facts to which he rarely descends. The condition-of-pictures question hardly ever once entered his mind. His own pictures decay almost as soon as they are painted, and he never takes cognisance of the fact:

intent upon immortality, the contingent decay, even in his own pictures, strangely enough, is a matter of indifference.

Long after this passage was written, the writer met, in a number of the *Art Journal* for 1853, with the following statement relative to the condition of some pictures bequeathed by J. M. W. Turner to the National Gallery :—‘It is tolerably well known to those who, of late years, have had access to Turner’s dwelling-house, that the pictures he has bequeathed to the country are in such a state as to require the immediate attention of the “restorer;” and if something be not soon done, they will, in a very short time, be comparatively worthless as works of art. We believe that Turner, during his lifetime, applied to Mr. John Seguier to undertake the task, but was alarmed at the price named by the latter.’

It may indeed be questioned whether the painter is ever the fit person to restore his own pictures. If Guido had been asked (an instance is on record) to revive one of the faded works of his own hand, he in all probability would have preferred repainting to the tedious process of cleaning and repairing. What could Reynolds have done with the countless cracks and faded tints which characterised the chief of his portraits not many years after they were painted? Would he have possessed the patience to stipple, like a small miniature, the various disfigurements presented? Doubtless he would have taken the liberty to repaint, and then what would have become of the resemblances? It was easy to perceive that a portrait by Etty, in the Society of Arts’ exhibition, had been in part repainted by its author. The beautiful production had become much cracked, and the impetuous artist had repainted

portions, instead of following the course of each particular crack. The effect was incongruous enough, combining in one frame the early, modest, quiet style, with the florid and extravagant manner of the painter's latter years.

Turner was wise, who, on discovering some of his best works were decaying, sent for a professed restorer. He would not risk his own capricious pencil in the matter-of-fact task of reparation, though the injuries were in his own favourite pictures.

The most famous of collectors of the works of the old masters, have not attended academies for the information to guide them ; and, indeed, would not find it there if they did. The spirit breathed within the walls of academies, devoted to particular ends, if not deficient in liberality, usually wants the comprehensiveness of the accomplished connoisseur. Students in painting are mostly uneducated, and professors of painting have mostly strong prejudices. A reference to the biographies of a large number of painters will leave no question that they are, as a class, remarkable for extreme notions, contrarieties, and eccentricities. Level, solid judgment, based upon careful education, ought to constitute the liberal judge of art. Prejudice and true connoisseurship can scarcely well exist together. That distinct individualism which lends variety and interest to the painters, must ever seem like illiberality in the connoisseur, blinding him to the just claims of all those artists whose modes of thinking and working differ from a peculiar choice. It might be right, and necessary, for a painter to devote his life to particular ends ; but he is just the reverse of a comprehensive lover of the arts, who is exclusive in his admiration of particular artists, leaving unnoticed

others equally meritorious. It is not to the taste, the desire, nor the interest, of rising painters, bent upon securing an immortal reputation for themselves, to trouble overmuch about works of others. Your Lawrences are as much opposed to your Holbeins, and your Turners to your Claudes, as night to day. A gentleman may interest himself in pictures, whose bad drawing, or inharmonious colouring, might have a pernicious influence on the practitioner, who would run the risk of imbibing a hard, crude, outline from one, and, it might be, 'a dirty tint' from another. What is food for the connoisseur may be poison to the painter. The collector consults illustrious artists in vain; and he is eventually convinced (to use the words of Daniel Webb) 'that nothing is a greater hindrance to his acquiring an intimate acquaintance with the old masters than entertaining too high an opinion of the judgment of professors in painting.' He, with some exceptions, 'finds each artist an implicit admirer of some particular school, or a slave to some particular manner.' And seldom indeed does it occur to the successful painter that the works of the old masters require his friendly aid. Neglect scatters her dust like a dark veil over all, the excellent and the worthless; but the too self-conscious genius of to-day, blinded by the splendour of his own course, heeds not the far off dying lamps which flicker in the past, and one by one go out.

CHAPTER XII.

PICTURE DESTROYERS.

PICTURE-FRAME makers, house painters and decorators, are seldom deterred by any scruples from writing themselves up proficients in the art of restoring the pictures of the old masters. One possesses a famous compound, a newly-invented preparation ; another, an extraordinary elixir, concocted from a very old recipe, which never fails to renew the colours of old paintings, however faded they may have become through lapse of centuries or modern ill-usage ; a third, is possessed of a secret for making a varnish, which beats glass out of the market for clearness and durability—it is warranted ‘ neither to discolour, bloom, nor crack,’ so that those pictures which are so fortunate as to get a few coatings of the said varnish will be astonishingly improved in all respects, and in all probability last for ever.

The well-informed, however, are seldom induced by pretensions of this order, to intrust their pictures to hands guiltless of art-principles, and to operators who have no explanation to give of the special treatment each particular picture, or class of pictures, seems to require. The judicious collector rather dreads the cleverness of quacks, who would make one common recipe suffice for all the productions of genius, so manifold and infinitely various in their nature as works of genius ever are. The professors of picture-restoration are very numerous in London, familiarly known by the sign hung out at their doors ; generally, an old

portrait, one half clean, the other half dirty, as a specimen to convince the unwary connoisseur that the proprietor of the shop can restore pictures. The mere fact of hanging out a specimen of picture-cleaning to attract the attention of passers-by, is perhaps not necessarily a proof of the shopkeeper's inability to equal his professions ; but there is a something in this fashion of advertising which makes the prudent connoisseur question the spirit and artistic faculty of the proprietor ; and reflection usually leads to the conclusion, that the show-picture is a sign of the shopkeeper's incapacity. Many who have had the guardianship of pictures, have preferred to leave them to the ordinary decay arising from neglect, to risking their utter destruction by what seemed to them the uncertain process of cleaning. Instances, on the other hand, are not wanting of those who, with unpardonable haste, have called in the common enemy, in the person of one of these picture-owners, whose operations (saving a miracle) were conducted at the expense of the picture itself ; not intentionally nor malignantly, no doubt, for where there is neither the faculty to distinguish, nor the taste to appreciate, there can be no accountability for injury, and the excuse is ignorance.

Let it not be thought, however, that all the fine pictures injured by cleaning suffer exclusively at the hands of the class of persons referred to. Gentlemen picture cleaners abound who will destroy more on a fine morning before breakfast, than one of your advertisers in a whole year. As parents are supposed best to understand the necessities of their own children, so many collectors assume to know best how to treat the requirements of their pictures. De Burtin, writing on picture cleaning, uses some plausible reasons to induce

owners of pictures to dabble in solvents. Extreme love for the gem he thinks the best guarantee for its safety when under the operation of cleaning. De Burtin also thinks that reading De Burtin on 'Picture Cleaning' (that is, his own book), with a little practice, all that are required to make a man of fortune a successful operator. If gentlemen collectors were disposed to devote their time and fortunes to that one sole object, advantage to art might possibly, in some instances, be the result. A little leisure and a little practice, with no matter how much affection, will fail to produce a competent professor of picture restoration, whatever De Burtin has said to the contrary.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RESTORER.

ON contemplating a face, or number of faces, successfully exhibiting delicate sentiments and deep passions, we are struck with the story they tell, or the moral they combine to represent, and we marvel at the skill of the artist who could, so to speak, create anew the life, by the aid of simple lines and colours. We should marvel more did our reflections lead us to consider each particular part of the process by which the life-like forms came fashioned from the painter's hand. It were instructive to contemplate the process, from the laying of the first broad general grounds of colour, to the critical and final retouchings, by which the niceties of expression were arrived at, and which were the finish of the work and the evidence of mastery. It is these finishing touches, the 'glazings,' 'scumblings,' 'blendings,' and 'pointings,' whether considered as mere texture, or as intellectual refinements, which tax the restorer's art and claim his vigilance. The sculptor wastes away the rude block till he has accomplished the desired form. Not so the painter. He builds up his forms from a blank surface, and hides, as he progresses, all the preliminary layers upon which the external colours depend for durability and lustre. And hence, not only the meaning and spirit of the work must be understood; the restorer must also be familiar with the nature of the materials and the manner of their employment.

The restorer should also be deeply read in those es-

tablished principles which test the truth and goodness of pictorial representations. He should understand linear perspective, that he may know where its laws have been adhered to, and where ignored. He should be acquainted with aërial perspective, that he may in certain works appreciate its many and various beauties. He should be master of anatomy, that he may be careful not to injure the works of those artists which exhibit an accurate acquaintance of the human figure. He should understand the principles of colouring, so far as they have been ascertained, that he may be free from the danger of injuring beauties founded on principles, and, at the same time, be in a position to understand, and respect, if not to admire, works painted without any definite knowledge of colours. The practical restorer should study to the end, that his mind may become, as it were, an index of the various styles of painting practised by the masters whose works are his care. Be the style of a painter simple or complex, graceful or ungraceful, it should be registered in its place. The restorer, like the physician, should have no bias. It is for him to trace with untiring industry, and unerring precision, the many fine distinctions in each particular work he may have to treat. He ought to comprehend, not only the meaning and spirit of each work, but be able to trace, bit by bit, with microscopic exactness, the means and the method which the artist employed to accomplish it. It is not enough for the restorer to know the results, he must also penetrate their causes—that the effects may not suffer. It would seem that nothing less than a master mind could achieve the successful treatment of a master work, but it comes out in the end, that a restorer of inferior power, profiting by the creations of the artist, may be able to appreciate

their excellencies though unable to produce them : just as the critic discovers in another the qualities he could never have invented himself. In a word, the restorer has wholly to devote himself to the study of pictures, until he has made himself as familiar with the productions of many pencils as the ambitious painter does with a few select examples.

It is quite possible to conceive an accomplished restorer, fulfilling the high functions of *conserver* to the arts, content in that capacity, and devoting all his energies, with frank good will and hearty self-respect, to the preservation of the works of others—willing to forego any reputation he might himself achieve as a painter for the general good of art—content to be the servant and the friend of painters, not their rival. He should be favourable to the growth and exchange of congenial sympathies, and he might well become an adviser to them in some minor practical difficulties often experienced by creative genius. The painter not unfrequently works in ignorance of the mechanical department of his art. Through the neglect of what he is too apt to think unworthy of his attention, the rationale of his materials and their uses, he often labours in vain, and grasps at last but that transient reputation which only lives, like the actor's and the musician's, in the breath of memory, and by the tongue of report.

CHAPTER XIV.

DEVOTION OF THE RESTORER.

LET it not be thought that the man who earnestly devotes his life to the service of art in the capacity of restorer, is necessarily destitute of the mature aspirations of the painter. It is possible to be as mindful, and to display as much care for the preservation of an author's productions, as the author himself could desire. True, a sincere love and appreciation are essential; and who doubts the existence of profound interest and affection for the works of great poets and painters? Critics may be found devoting their best energies in the purification of a poet's text; and why may not others display equal zeal over the lines and colours of the artist? We can realise the annotator, by long study, acquiring something of the dramatist's way of thinking, and the power to re-state passages accidentally become obscure, and to re-render vague conjunctions of words into delicate expressions of sentiment and animated descriptions. So with injured or obscured works of the old painters—similar intelligence and devotion will enable the restorer to perform like services to the picture art.

Often do we see men unceasing in their application after less important concerns. An entomologist will beat the dark copse through the long night, in order that he may add one more variegated moth to his case; he will traverse the swamp, that an insignificant gnat may be represented in his collection, and watch a whole season to capture a rare butterfly. So with the botanist and his plants, the conchologist with his shells, and the

antiquarian with his relics. No trouble is too great for these faithful students. The restorer, too, who is duly impressed with the importance of his object, with the same disregard of exertion, collects everything relating to his craft in the form of drawing, print, or etching, bearing the stamp of the master's hand. He seeks after the obsolete, pores over old books, gleaning here and there particular facts. In ancient mansion, gallery, or cathedral, wherever the old painters have left the impress of genius on the walls—in dim ancestral portraits or nobler visions of creative thought—there the restorer makes his study and his home. His well-taught eye detects the slow decay which lurks beneath the surface of resplendent colours. An atom of dust betrays to him the presence of the insidious worm; he watches the subtle film, left by the moist air, and baked by the sun or fire, as day by day its presence obscures each tender tint and softened hue. Whatever tends to injure the objects of his care arrests his attention, and ordinary decay, the consequence of neglect, or the effects of malice, he labours to repair. Bending before the sacred ruin, he regards it with no less awe than if he were conscious that the author of the work still lingered near. Harbouuring no mercenary thoughts, he rises to his task with just and conscious pride, feeling that the last will and testament of a great artist is in his hands, himself the chosen minister to carry out the last behest. Thus cheerfully, with light and gentle touch, he day by day reveals some portion of the buried treasure—some gleaming fragment of poetic thought. As old monastic sculptors, by faith and genius inspired, laboured until the quarry of shapeless stones became impressed with the light fantastic form and character of the wood-

land bower, so in patience and endurance the work of the restorer proceeds, until at last, the dark, unmeaning space presents a paradise of splendour peopled with groups of life-like, breathing forms. Immured in the solitude of the vaulted church, he engages in the long and gracious task of restoring these relics of bygone ages, in the generous love of art itself, and with the hope of perpetuating the great creations of the past. He pictures to himself the authors of those faded images toiling for long years with the zeal of martyrs, philosophic patience, and godlike power of hand, to win for themselves immortal crowns. But as no miracle happened to aid them in their work, either in the drawing of lines or mixing of tints, so no miracle saved these from the ordinary casualties of—decay. The fissure in the wall, the gap in the high roof, damp mists from open doors and casements, and the smoke of censer, taper, and lamp, are active agents of destruction—to say nothing of the bigot's fury and the soldier's rage. And looking back through the long, dreary, troubled night of disrespect and cold indifference, shrouding like a dim pall the works of the great painters, far from wondering that their glory has somewhat diminished, we might oftentimes well regard it as miraculous indeed that a vestige remains, to tell where beauty and gracefulness once mutely reigned and won their silent victory over the proud heart.

THE END.





2/84

I.J.LX

6496

GETTY CENTER LIBRARY



3 3125 00014 7179

